

## Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat July 16, 2021

### Summary

The nation's third [#RuralTransitDay](#) Twitter Chat on July 16, 2021 was moderated by Angie Jones, District Manager, Grant County Transportation District (People Mover), Tyler Bender, Ohio RTAP Manager, and Paula Smith, Executive Director, Tri River Transit Authority. The chat focused on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and through the year, and included a discussion about challenges, solutions, and best practices for rural transit.

There were over 13,160 impressions just from National RTAP Rural Transit Day tweets. Action Committee for Transit, Alaska DOT, Atom Records, Brazos Transit District, Cascadia Rail, Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS), Catoosa Walker News, Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), City of Brunswick, GA, Columbiana County Mobility Management, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), Cubic Transportation Systems, Earl Public Transit, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Feonix Mobility Rising, First Fly Travel, Florida RTAP, Gary White (Screenwriter, Producer and Managing Partner at Polite Productions), Georgia State University, HIRTA Public Transit, Georgia DOT, Georgia State University, Johnson County (Iowa), Kansas RTAP, National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT), North Carolina Democratic Party, North Central Regional Transit District, OATS Transit, Ohio DOT, People Mover, Pluto TV, RSG Inc., San Jose State University, Senator Brad Pfaff of Wisconsin, Stardust Supernova, Texas DOT, Train Explainer, Transit Happy, Transportation Choices Coalition, Tri River Transit Authority, UC Berkeley Institute of Transportation Studies, VAX Transit, and Wecom Inc. were among the many organizations and individuals who participated in the chat. There was even a “like” of one of the tweets by what seemed to be a dog that had its own Twitter account.

Some highlights: Alaska's Governor Mike Dunleavy [proclaimed](#) July 16 as Rural Transit Day in Alaska. Georgia DOT announced the launch of the [Let's Ride Rural](#) transit website and mobile app today in coordination with Rural Transit Day. Rural Georgians now have an easy way to plan and book travel with participating rural transit providers. We reached our target of 125 [Rural Transit Day Pledges](#).

Visit the [chat transcript](#) for questions asked during the chat and attendees' replies. We also have a [news page](#) with more information about the special day. Answers to chat questions are provided below.

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**Question 1:** What do you think of when you hear rural transit or public transportation? What is the best thing about rural public transit?

**Answers:**

- “Recognize the people, organizations, and agencies that ensure mobility and independence for folks who live in remote areas,” said Senator Brad Pfaff, who represents Wisconsin's 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County. “Let's celebrate bringing people closer together one trip at a time.”
- The North Carolina Democratic Party are grateful to the folks who staff and ride North Carolina's rural transportation. They took an opportunity to share an editorial in a local newsletter about the infrastructure bill during the chat.
- Brazos Transit District loves rural transit because at the end of the day you can go home knowing your efforts made a difference in someone's life.
- “Rural Transit means providing access to essential services for those in rural areas,” said Tim Mildren, NCRTD Finance Director. “Rural Transit means coming together as a community and empowering one another to make a difference in people's lives,” added Morningstar Tapia, Marketing & Promotions Coordinator. “Rural Transit means giving people in our community access to the resources they need,” added Stephen Dahlquist, Executive Assistant.
- When N-CATT thinks of rural transit, they think of the operators and staff that keep folks moving to the places they need to go. Their favorite thing is the community that rural transit fosters.
- From Transit Happy - Rural transit means more people can live where they want to and still get to where they need to!
- “Rural transit enables connection to food, healthcare, work, and leisure in the places that aren't always top-of-mind in the transit discussion. But that connection to opportunity makes a world of difference for people who live in, and love, rural communities,” says Stewart Mader from VAX Transit.
- From HIRTA - Rural Transit means connecting the community with a valued service. We act as a bridge to those who rely on public transportation to get where they need to go. The best part is being able to make a difference in a rider's life.
- Rural transit embodies the best of neighbors helping neighbors. The spirit of making trips happen, no matter the barriers, is what I think of when I hear about rural transit. CTAA staff have never had to remind rural transit operators that their job is about moving people (and not running buses). Serving people is hard baked into the rural transit DNA.
- Fay Min, a volunteer at National RTAP said, “When I think of rural transit, I think about how it is an inclusive service that provides for communities and individuals in need.” Another Fay (from Kansas), said, “We get people where they need to be today and every day!”

- From Florida RTAP: Rural transit means everyone, no matter where they live, are connected with all of life's opportunities, services and needs - and with each other.
- “Rural transit is where innovation thrives every day to provide needed access with limited resources to the greater part of our country, ‘this land is our land.’” - Dave Marsh, chief executive officer of CARTS
- From CTAA: Rural transit embodies the best of neighbors helping neighbors. The spirit of making trips happen, no matter the barriers, is what we think of when I hear about rural transit.
- National RTAP executive director Robin Phillips stated, “Rural Transit can help us imagine our transportation system as a connected network for getting around town or country, ours and many others.”
- "Rural transit is how I fell in love with transit," Gardner Urena, Transportation Choices Coalition
- AlexAnotherOne said on Twitter that RURAL PUBLIC TRANSIT IS THE BEST THING EVAR OMG OMG YES.

**Question 2:** What are some ways rural and urban transit systems can partner?

**Answers:**

- The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) stated, “Sharing lessons learned across all transit systems is especially important as momentum builds around deploying zero emission buses. N-CATT offers resources to help bridge knowledge gaps and support agencies in their pursuit of clean transportation!”
- Transit Happy shared how Sunline Transit has showcased zero-emission bus benefits to other agencies big and small.
- CTAA knows that rural and urban transit, in many parts of the country, effectively partner to create regional connectivity. These partnerships provide access to rural residents to health care, jobs, education, human/social services, retail and so much more.
- From N-CATT: One way rural and urban transit systems can partner is on coordinating for a more seamless rider experience. Technology and data sharing can help coordinate rides across service areas! N-CATT has a whole website full of learning and planning resources for rural, small-urban and tribal transportation providers and communities that can help.
- According to HIRTA, urban and rural transportation can work together to help ensure EVERYONE has equal access to transportation.
- [Connected Colorado](#) is a project of Colorado DOT that is developing and building a centralized digital mobility hub that enables greater use of the statewide transit by connecting rural and urban transit providers.
- Steward Mader explained that being able to plan your full itinerary on transit makes it competitive with the customer experience of driving. This is critical to building transit use in ways that make it more feasible for people to switch from driving to taking the bus or train.
- A [study](#) from Rural Health Research Gateway and Southwest RHRC shows the disparities between travel distance to healthcare for rural and urban individuals. Rural-urban transit partnerships can help bridge the gap.

- “Rural and urban transit systems can partner on creating a more efficient and better experience for everyone through modern trends like technology and data sharing,” stated Fay Min.
- NADTC believes that rural transit can partner with urban systems by providing travel training on both systems, allowing riders to be comfortable using both services.
- SURCOM’s [2021 Rural Transit Fact Book](#) has a table on Rural Service Provided by Urban Transit Agencies. This accounted for 101,443,553 vehicle revenue miles in 2019.
- “Rural and urban transit agencies can partner through state transit associations to pool resources and work together to improve the state of transit for all rural, suburban, and urban passengers!” declared Ohio RTAP Manager Tyler Bender.

**Question 3:** How has COVID-19 affected transit in your area? What are you doing for to make the recovery successful?

**Answers:**

- Rural transit agencies around the country learned just how essential the operations are during the pandemic, shared CTAA. Rural transit operators served their communities in so many important and often unexpected ways during the pandemic. CTAA will be releasing a White Paper that will feature numerous examples of rural transit making a difference during the pandemic. They’re proud of their collective work to make sure rural transit operators weren’t forgotten in the COVID stimulus programs -- "There's transit outside of the cities, too!" HIRTA appreciates all CTAA does for being a voice at the Federal level in educating decision makers on the importance of rural transit.
- “The pandemic has put a halt to people utilizing transit for many reasons,” noted Fay Min. “The routes currently available help people in need of transportation to get to places they need whether it is for work or medical purposes.”
- When the world shut down, rural transit agencies stepped in to provide access to all Texans. Last month Texas DOT approved \$89 million in funding for transit agencies that help Texans get to work, health care and other daily needs.
- N-CATT has seen impacts such as ridership declines, passenger limits, and agencies going zero fare. Throughout the past year and a half, they've noticed that interest in contactless fare payment has grown A LOT.
- COVID has impacted HIRTA, like so many others. HIRTA is still being diligent with safety and cleaning procedures. Right now, they are educating the public that public transit is safe to ride and they're ready to welcome them back! HIRTA was one of the leaders in developing a pandemic plan early on. We posted it on our website at [https://www.nationalrtap.org/Portals/0/HIRTA\\_Pandemic\\_Plan\\_2020.pdf](https://www.nationalrtap.org/Portals/0/HIRTA_Pandemic_Plan_2020.pdf).
- Ridership decreased drastically with so many people out of work or staying home. People Mover’s free routes make it much easier for everyone to get to vital appointments, shopping and more!

**Question 4:** How do you recognize your staff for the great work they do? Have you done anything special for these Rural Transit Heroes during COVID-19?

**Answers:**

- People Mover provides treats and different types of "thank you's" for our transit staff on a regular basis! They have been acknowledged in our local newspaper as well.
- HIRTA couldn't have gotten through COVID-19 without their drivers stepping up for their community. They regularly celebrate their #HIRTAHeroes. And part of their website is dedicated for the public to Thank a HIRTA Hero!
- Many CTAA members offered their drivers additional pay for their courageous service to their communities during the pandemic.
- Feonix Mobility Rising thanks rural transit agencies and their staff for their commitment to providing safe and effective transportation to their communities to ensure residents are able to reach their place of need.
- NCRTD has weekly Feature Friday posts on their social media channels recognizing all their team members. This allows their followers to learn more about their team!
- Some Florida agencies do the following: peer-to-peer recognition program, reserved parking space and gift cards, Annual Volunteer Recognition Day, and an extra day off.
- COTA [was named](#) one of best US companies for women to work for. COTA offers programs that encourage the advancement of women, including a college tuition reimbursement program.
- N-CATT has seen agencies offer additional pay (hazard or bonuses) for their work on keeping people moving during the pandemic. Also, local advocacy groups working to recognize staff is always wonderful!

**Question 5:** Do you have a passenger appreciation day? Tell us about it.

**Answers:**

- Feonix Mobility Rising thanks their passengers for continuing to rely on us to connect them with their destinations efficiently and safely.
- A Florida agency provides 10 cent rides during the holiday season.
- HIRTA celebrated their customers today by going out into the communities and delivering goodie bags! They also provided FREE rides in all their counties.
- Clovis Transit created a [video](#) just for their Passenger Appreciation Day

**Question 6:** What is the funniest or most unusual thing you have had happen or seen happen while on rural transit?

**Answers:**

- From CTAA, "I once saw a rural transit driver recognize that a passenger's oxygen tank was running low -- and run back in the passenger's home, get a new tank and replace the low one aboard the vehicle. Aboard a rural transit bus in Oregon, the driver pulled over so we could all watch the most beautiful sunset. It added at least 15 minutes to the trip -- and none of us minded a bit! Another time, a group of passengers realized that a regular rider was under the weather -- so they went ahead and did that passengers' grocery shopping for the week and brought it to their home. Amazing."
- NADTC recalls learning about a system in a college town who had to implement a policy for a minimum length of lumber, BC students were transporting their lofted bed materials on the bus back to the dorms!

- An agency in Florida once had a passenger try to board with a new fridge.
- Darcy Darbyshire and Eli Blanchette [celebrated their wedding](#) on a BC Transit bus. They were joined by family members, photographer, and (of course) their wedding officiant. Plenty of seats for all!
- Robin Phillip's mom got a driver to pick some dirt for her garden up at the store. Another day, her mom got to the train station after the last bus and the transit supervisor asked her where she was going and drove her to Robin's house. Robin also met one of her best friends on the bus home from work.
- NCRTD loves Transit Jokes! Every Wednesday, they feature Wednesday Humor posts to their social media channels to bring smiles & laughs!
- Angie Jones from People Mover heard about an alpaca that tried to board the bus.

**Question 7:** Where's your favorite place to travel on rural transit?

**Answers:**

- Fay Min would love to travel by rural transit to a ski destination. Robin Phillips agreed that skiing is a great bus destination.
- National RTAP staff traveled out to rural Acton, MA and photographer Susan Symonds from Infinity Portrait Designs took some amazing "portraits" of a rural bus for our website, like the one on our homepage.
- Florida RTAP staff go to Key West, Florida. Florida Rural Transit Rocks! So many unique places from Key West to the Panhandle.
- "Everywhere!" exclaimed Angie Jones of People Mover. "It's the best way to see this amazing country and the people who live here!"
- HIRTA loves when riders use HIRTA to go to local businesses, community events and farmers markets!

**Question 8:** How are you celebrating Rural Transit Day?

**Answers:**

- N-CATT enjoyed celebrating with y'all on the #RuralTransitDay Twitter chat!
- NCRTD enjoyed celebrating with everyone on this amazing Rural Transit Day Twitter chat and featuring their team members! They created their own Rural Transit Day Heroes cards and featured many of their staff's photos and stories and a ["This is How We Celebrate" video](#), featuring Transit Operator Joe McKale dancing.
- National RTAP didn't ask for this to be created, and can't endorse this, but we still think it's a fun way of celebrating by wearing a creative [Happy Rural Transit Day t-shirt](#) from France.
- Florida RTAP sent appreciation messages to their listserv.
- First Fly Travel offered 50% off online booking.
- Alaska DOT showed a Throwback Thursday bus [photo](#) the day before Rural Transit Day of a Northern Bus Company bus on Dock Street in Ketchikan from 1951.
- HIRTA offered free rides, giveaways, participated in this lovely Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat, created a blog post (<http://ridehirta.com/rural-transit-day>) and of course, shared the

video they made on what rural transit means to their staff -  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mb\\_5rD83gE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mb_5rD83gE)

**Question 9:** Bragging time! Has your rural transit system done anything awesome since last year's Rural Transit Day that you want to share?

**Answers:**

- N-CATT launched a podcast series, [Next Stop: Transit Tech](#). They interview transit agencies across the country implementing tech, from CAD software, to automated vehicles, to micromobility programs! They love celebrating rural transit. N-CATT produced a podcast episode with People Mover's own, Angie Jones! They focused on real-time passenger information implementation, and it was such a fun interview!
- The federal Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy provided a tool for those planning a road trip in their electric vehicle, the [Alternative Fuels Data Center Station Locator](#). This tool can help you find the closest charging stations on your route, and can be downloaded as an app.
- Thousands of Americans got access to the COVID vaccine because of rural transit. That's something we can all brag about! Florida agencies provided over 13,500 trips to more than 5,000 passengers for COVID vaccinations. 13 agencies provided their statistics.
- Pullman Transit in Pullman, Washington envisions having an entire fleet of fully electric buses, and [just rolled out](#) their first two.
- Kitsap Transit in Bainbridge Island, Washington [launched a mobile app](#) can book, track and pay for a trip on Kitsap Transit's on-demand bus service for getting almost anywhere on the island.
- Government Fleet and APWA [announced](#) the 2021 Leading Fleets. Rural fleets awarded for leadership, efficiency, planning for the future, and overcoming challenges included Dublin, Ohio and the City of San Luis Obispo.
- Cherokee Nation was the [first tribe in US to self-govern tribal transportation](#).
- People Mover worked hard and were able to maintain services through the pandemic! They didn't have to cut routes, hours or anything.
- HIRTA is so proud of all the great accomplishments this past year. From launching their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion promises (<http://RideHIRTA.com/DEI>), to being awarded multiple grants, a ton of fun projects and so much more!

**Question 10:** We're awarding a Rural Transit Day t-shirt to the first person who answers this question and to the tweet with the most likes – What does rural transit mean to you?

**Answers:**

- Jeremy Johnson-Miller, Communications Manager of NADTC was the first person who answered the question during the chat and was a t-shirt winner. "Rural transit means connectivity to surrounding communities and being able to age in place!" declared Jeremy.
- "Providing quality & life services to those that need it and transportation options to those who choose to use it." - Delilah Garcia, NCRTD Transit Operations Director, who won a t-shirt for the tweet during the chat with the most likes

- “Rural transit to me means creating an inclusive and diverse community where everyone feels supported and is receiving the help they need to be successful in life,” says Fay Min.
- “Transit serves such a vital role in all of our communities urban and rural. Lifting up transit means lifting up all members of a community,” stated Tyler Bender, Ohio RTAP Manager.
- N-CATT feels that Rural transit means mobility options for all to live your best life with Sparkles flexibility and freedom.
- HIRTA believes that rural transit means providing a service to the community. EVERYONE benefits from public transit - transportation plays a huge role in so many facets of life.
- Jaime McKay shared, “Rural transit means that everyone, everywhere, can travel safely and efficiently to where they need - and want - to go.”
- From People Mover, “It's a lifeline for our community! A connection for surrounding areas and just a great asset overall!”
- For Robin Phillips, “Rural transit means I can get there!”